



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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PRESS RELEASE

Patterson drilling down for answer to Texas water crisis

State set to invest in purifying brackish water for commercial sale in Central Texas

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AUSTIN — Along Interstate 35, between Austin and San Antonio, the Texas Economic Miracle is thirsting for water. Tight restrictions on the Edwards Aquifer and the high costs of pipelines are choking off the potential growth of homes and businesses.

But on one 2,000-acre tract of land north of New Braunfels - still parched from last year's drought - Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson hopes he's found the water needed to help end Central Texas' water crisis.

As chairman of the School Land Board, which manages the real estate portfolio of the state's \$26 billion Permanent School Fund, Patterson is investigating the feasibility of tapping into Texas' abundant brackish groundwater, desalinating it, and selling it.

"We don't need to live one step away from crisis and drought," Patterson said. "Texas may be short on water, but not innovation. Desal is part of Texas' water future and we're going to start right here."

Patterson said the General Land Office has contracted with experts to study the hydrology and geology of several Permanent School Fund tracts of land along the I-35 corridor. "If the water is there, then I think the School Land Board is ready to invest the time and resources needed to deliver an entirely new and drought-resistant source of water for Central Texas," Patterson said. "This is a game-changer, a commonsense fix for the Texas water crisis."

The impact of developing a new source of water in Central Texas will be seen all the way downstream, Patterson said, potentially benefitting rice farmers, petrochemical facilities, utilities and even the health of the state's bays and estuaries. "Adding desal to the mix would help mitigate the impact of a drought on the Highland Lakes," Patterson said. "Desal in Central Texas would help all the way to the coast."

Patterson said he hopes to develop a groundwater desalination model that could be replicated on other state-owned tracts of land all over Texas. "Texas has an abundance of brackish water," Patterson said. "I hope to put the General Land Office in the water business statewide."

The coming Texas water crisis was highlighted in this month's *Texas Monthly*, which points out the importance of finding solutions now, before the state's population doubles in the next 50 years.

After all, Patterson said, necessity really is the mother of invention. "We can't plan on taking any more fresh water from the Edwards Aquifer. It takes 30 years to get a new lake permitted and filled. Pipelines cost a fortune," Patterson said. "If we want to keep growing, we need water and I think desal is a common-sense part of that solution."

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